

VZCZCXRO8503
PP RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #0549/01 1011109
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 101109Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0513
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000549

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DEPT FOR AF/SPG, S/CRS
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE SPLM-RIZEIGAT ALLIANCE IN SOUTH DARFUR?

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In meetings in Nyala with emboffs on November 7, multiple political leaders reported that the Arab (Baggara) Rizeigat tribe had created an alliance with the SPLM. However, on November 7, the Nazir of the Rizeigat denied any association with the SPLM, scoffing at the idea and calling it part of Sudan's political game. Although SLM-Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) leaders in Nyala appeared supportive of the SPLM-Rizeigat partnership, expressed hope for more coordination with the SPLM, and avowed great admiration for Salva Kiir, they stated that the SPLM has an almost non-existent presence in Nyala - one that has not reached out to SLM-MM. The North Darfur Minister of Health, a prominent SPLM member, told FieldOff on April 9 that the MOU under discussion grew out of the recent defection of ten prominent Rizeigat National Congress Party members to the SPLM, in the continuation of an alliance born from necessity. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On April 7, the Fur Maqdam, Ahmad Adam Rijal, told emboffs that the SPLM had recently signed an agreement with the Rizeigat of South Darfur. He stated that the Rizeigat and SPLM are organizing a meeting in Daein scheduled for April 18 where it is expected that they will formally announce this alliance.

¶3. (SBU) Also on April 7, three SLM-MM leaders reported to emboffs that the Rizeigat and SPLM were close to reaching an agreement. Hassan Salah Nahas, Khata Arko Minnawi (brother of Minni Minawi), both of the Security Arrangements Committee, and Mohamed Kobay, a former representative to the Ceasefire Commission, told emboffs that seven native Rizeigat administrators from Buram and Daein are currently visiting Juba to discuss an alliance with the SPLM. They stated that this coordination is logical, as the Rizeigat have a historical and cultural affinity with Southerners due to their nomadic migration patterns during the summer months. However, they did not trust that an agreement would hold because many Southern Sudanese still believed that the Rizeigat could return to their alliance with the GoS at any time (since this tribe had made up many of the janjaweed employed by the GoS to fight against the SPLA during the North-South war). Nahas warned that the NCP would attempt to do everything within its power to break this alleged alliance between the Rizeigat and the SPLM.

¶4. (SBU) SLM-MM leaders stated that they were intrigued by the idea of this partnership, but not optimistic that the SPLM could bring change to Darfur. They said that if Salva Kiir came to Nyala, he would get a bigger reception than would President Bashir, but that there has not been any coordination between SLM-MM and the SPLM in Nyala. They said that SLM-MM's main concern is not building alliances, but rather attempting to implement the Darfur Peace Agreement. They reported that the SPLM has very little presence in Nyala, but that it may be more active in other areas of south Darfur such as Daein, where it reportedly maintains its South Darfur headquarters. Mohamed Kobay said he already doubts the usefulness of political participation as "there is no freedom for political activities in Darfur - bad things will happen to you if you look

like you are stronger than the National Congress Party (NCP)."

15. (SBU) Later on April 7, the Nazir of the Rizeigat (who is in a position to know), Sayyed Musa Madibbo, told emboffs that the discussion of a SPLM-Rizegat partnership is "completely false." The Rizeigat Nazir denied SPLM-Rizeigat coordination, stating that these are "just games" used to stage political attacks. He said that it is possible that some of the Rizeigat tribal leaders are affiliated with the SPLM, but their number is very few and almost insignificant. Last year the SPLM was able to sign up some Rizeigat irregular forces in the area of Abu Matariq in South Darfur [Note: Madibbo is also head of the Native Administration, an organization of traditional leaders of 16 major tribes in Darfur. End Note.]

16. (SBU) The North Darfur Minister of Health, Abdel Shafee Essa Mustafa, a prominent SPLM member in El Fasher, told FieldOff on April 9 that the current discussions about the Rizeigat-SPLM alliance grew out of a defection at the end of March by ten prominent Rizeigat from the NCP to the SPLM. These officials were prominent NCP members in Daien, including mayors of given areas, and the Minister noted that the GoS was not happy about this defection. He recounted that the Rizeigat-SPLM alliance was not new but had been born out of necessity, as the Rizeigat needed the South's land for cattle grazing during the summer months, requiring a relationship with the SPLM. He added that this relationship deepened after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, when the Rizeigat, employed by the GoS as janjaweed militias against the SPLA, suddenly found themselves without the peace dividends offered to the GoS and the SPLM under the CPA. The Minister noted that this sense of exclusion drove 30,000 Rizeigat into SPLM ranks since the CPA signing.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite the Rizegat Nazir's denial, something formal may be in the works between the SPLM and Rizeigat in South Darfur (the SPLM leadership has not yet confirmed the alliance in

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conversations with us in Juba or Khartoum, but we will continue to seek confirmation as this is potentially a significant development).

The Rizeigat Nazir stuck to the party line and refused to confirm the alliance as well. However we question his influence among his people due to divisions among the Rizeigat themselves (the Nazir's brother, Ibrahim, is a leader of SLA/Free Will and reportedly signed an agreement with the GoS in Saudi Arabia in 2007). The SLM-MM leaders' avowed admiration of the SPLM in general contrasts with their pessimism regarding the SPLM's organization in South Darfur (despite the presence in Nyala of Omar Abdulrahman, the Minister of Agriculture, former SPLA colonel and former confidant of John Garang). As the SPLM works to transform itself into a truly national party, it should not only focus on Darfur's many tribes, but also strengthen its relationships with the DPA signatories.

FERNANDEZ